Individu en groep in het moderne bedrijf

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VI. SUMMARY

In this paper certain social phenomena in industry as they have been analyzed by sociology and social psychology, have been selected for a critical survey. From the wide field of human relations in industry only relations within the walls of the factory (or office) have been considered.

Between industrial sociology and industrial psychology no strict line of division has been drawn, as, through the rapid development of social psychology and its industrial applications, these fields have almost grown into one. The special field of intelligence and aptitude testing was left aside.

The application of social sciences to industrial problems has in the past been hampered by three circumstances: (1) The importance of the labor factor, in comparison to the other agents of production, has been underestimated. Industry attempted to solve its labor problems by traditional means, leaving no scope for scientific social research. (2) A tendency to compare the practical results of social research with the industrial successes of the more exact sciences did not enhance the prestige of the social sciences. (3) A weakness in social science itself, as pointed out by Mannheim, has been a tendency towards „partial thinking", whereas the solution of practical problems lies on the level of „interdependent thinking".

In spite of these circumstances industry has increasingly encouraged social research. A better understanding of human relations in industry was often followed by the prevention or solution of conflicts, increased productivity and the establishment of more effective training programs.

Reversely social science has profited greatly, in its development of both methods and theory, from its industrial investigations.

For an integrated treatment of social phenomena in industry we did not use one of the current sociological classifications. Tönnies' concepts Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft were found inadequate,

as in modern industry personal, emotionally loaded relationships are inbedded in an overwhelmingly depersonalized structure. To dub the modern enterprise as a group with a strong Gemeinschaft character, as is done by some Roman Catholic authors, is criticized as unrealistic and a dangerous underestimate of the element of organized power in employer-employee relations.

A classification of industrial phenomena in terms of formal and informal organization, although useful on the level of the organization as a whole, was not considered a sufficient tool for the analysis of individual behavior and the behavior of small face-to-face groups.

Following Mannheim's suggestion of the need for „interdependent thinking", the social phenomena in industry were considered as one integrated whole, which, according to Krech and Crutchfield, can be studied at three levels: (1) the level of the social behavior of the individual, (2) the level of the behavior of social groups, (3) the level of the operation of social organizations or institutions.

On the level of individual behavior, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes are studied by means of interviews and questionnaires. The advantages of these methods lie in the possibility of quantitative, statistical treatment and, especially in the case of questionnaires, in their anonymity and relatively low cost.

Job satisfaction, in relation to work conditions, home conditions and psychological factors, has been extensively investigated by these methods, in the U.S.A. and elsewhere. From a recent Dutch investigation by IJdo interesting results are quoted concerning the rank order of importance of a great number of these factors. The emotional tie with the factory and opinions of the workers' families seem to be very important, more perhaps than pay in itself.

Limitations of these methods lie in the fact that they deal with the isolated individual in the more or less artificial situation of being interviewed or filling out a questionnaire blank.

Behavior of the individual under group influence can thus seldom be predicted. Particular patterns of group behavior cannot be revealed.

On the level of small face to face groups some similarity is found

between the work group and the family, but differences arise from the fact that in the work group the recruitment of new members is strongly influenced by economic factors outside group control.

In the small work group patterns of sympathy, antipathy and leadership can be observed. Leadership in small groups is found to be not so much the attribute of a certain personality type, as the taking of a role, the exercise of a group-sanctioned activity.

The productivity of workers is strongly influenced by group norms and group control. Restriction of output by group action, sometimes viewed as an irrational act, inspired by fear of rapid technological changes, can often be considered as an act of substantial rationality in view of the weaknesses and extreme consequences of the piece-rate system. On the other hand improvements of productivity have been realized by activating group interest and especially by encouraging group decisions on output standards.

The author holds that attempts to disturb group relations (by impairing communication on the job and by frequent transfer of workers) in order to break restriction of output seldom pays economically and often is psychologically dangerous. Wanton disruption of group relations causes frustration in the worker, resulting in conscious and unconscious sabotage. The lack of personal relationships has been proved to increase labor turnover. The resulting isolation of the individual may in extreme cases be the cause of psychic disorders, sexual criminality, and, according to the famous study by Durkheim, suicide.

Some of the newer experiments in group behaviour and productivity are reviewed at the end of this chapter.

On the level of the factory (or office) as a whole a distinction can be made between formal and informal organization. Modern factory organization has already been characterized by Max Weber as „bureaucratic", i.e. by a high degree of specialization and formalization. Informal organization is described as a „paraphrase" of spontaneous human relations on the framework of formal relationships. Here examples are given from the author's own experience as an unskilled worker in various Scandinavian industries. A special study is made of three subjects: the informal position of office workers in industry and society, the controversial role of the

foreman, and finally the functioning of works councils. Figures are quoted on Joint Production Committees in Sweden from a large-scale opinion poll in which the author participated.

Both the problems concerning the foreman and the demonstrated inability of many production committees to arouse interest in rank and file workers are considered to be symptoms of a critical development in worker participation. There seems to be a wide and perhaps widening gap between the predominantly autocratic structure of factory organization and the generally democratic principles of Western society. It is doubtful whether production committees, patterned on the formal organization of political democracy, are adjusted to the reality of human relations on the shop floor. Other patterns of worker participation are discussed.

The last chapter deals with the development of industrial sociology, its need for more objective, controllable research methods and a more integrated theory; and the position of the industrial sociologist in society. The industrial sociologist has sometimes been the exponent of either workers' or employers' interests. The danger of a „managerial sociology" can be avoided by the present trend, especially patent in the U.S.A., to have industrial research sponsored by special institutes of recognized scientific standing, often connected with a university. Whereas private industrial consultants are mainly engaged in the solution of practical problems, such institutes (also found in Holland and other European countries) can concentrate on more basic social research in industry. In Holland, unfortunately, industrial sociology has not yet been introduced as a university course.

In the last paragraph the role of the factory or office as an institution of larger society is emphasized. Both on a general cultural level and in the geographically defined region of its location there is an intensive interaction between industry and society. Therefore industrial sociology should not only contribute to the solution of practical industrial problems, but also develop a more fundamental branch to deal with the general cultural implications of industrial work.

Christian Bay, jur. kand. and Nancy Bay, M. A., kindly reviewed the text of this Summary.